

1 March 2006

Ash Wednesday

READINGS

Psalm 130; Amos 5:6-15; Hebrews 12:1-14; Luke 18:9-14

DEVOTION

When I was in seminary, my parents moved to New Orleans and I was introduced to the concept of “Mardi Gras”. The Mardi Gras season begins with the Carnival Season on January 6, twelve days after Christmas (when the Wise Men arrived in Bethlehem). Carnival culminates on Mardi Gras, (which is a French term meaning “Fat Tuesday”) the day before Ash Wednesday.

While I’ve never visited New Orleans during Mardi Gras, I do remember watching a TV program about the days leading up to Fat Tuesday that left me shaking my head in disbelief. Persons interviewed said that on Fat Tuesday they try to do as much “sinful stuff” as they can get away with- all the while knowing that the next day they’d go to church and ask God’s forgiveness for their behavior while at the same time promising to give up those sins for the next forty days.

Self-denial may be some people’s approach to Lent, but I don’t believe it’s what Jesus had in mind when He spoke of taking up one’s cross and following Him (Matt. 16:24). His call for self- denial was a daily commitment to Him in all areas of life.

When Paul wrote to the Hebrews, he encouraged them (and us today) to “rid themselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:1-2). As believers in Jesus, we need to follow Him faithfully every day. It’s never right to take time-out from our commitment to Him.

During this Lenten season, take the time to reflect on your actions, your faith, and your purpose in life. Make a conscious decision to shed old habits and attitudes that bind you and keep you from being the person God created you to be.

Prayer: Lord, I want to serve you in full surrender. You are the potter and I am the clay. Mold me and make me after Thy will; while I am waiting yielded and still.

CH (MAJ) Jeff Bell, 40th CSG